DRAGON AGE™

THE SILENT GROVE

Part 2 of 6

For nearly a decade, King Alistair of Ferelden has ruled with a steady hand, seeing to his homeland's reconstruction after the darkspawn blight. But now he has left his home behind, journeying to distant Antiva to uncover a secret kept by the mysterious Crow assassins.

Alistair is accompanied by Isabela, a notorious pirate who has a troubled history with the Crows, and Varric Tethras, a dwarven merchant with connections in every stratum of society. But neither knows what Alistair truly seeks, or the deals he will make to find the truth . . .

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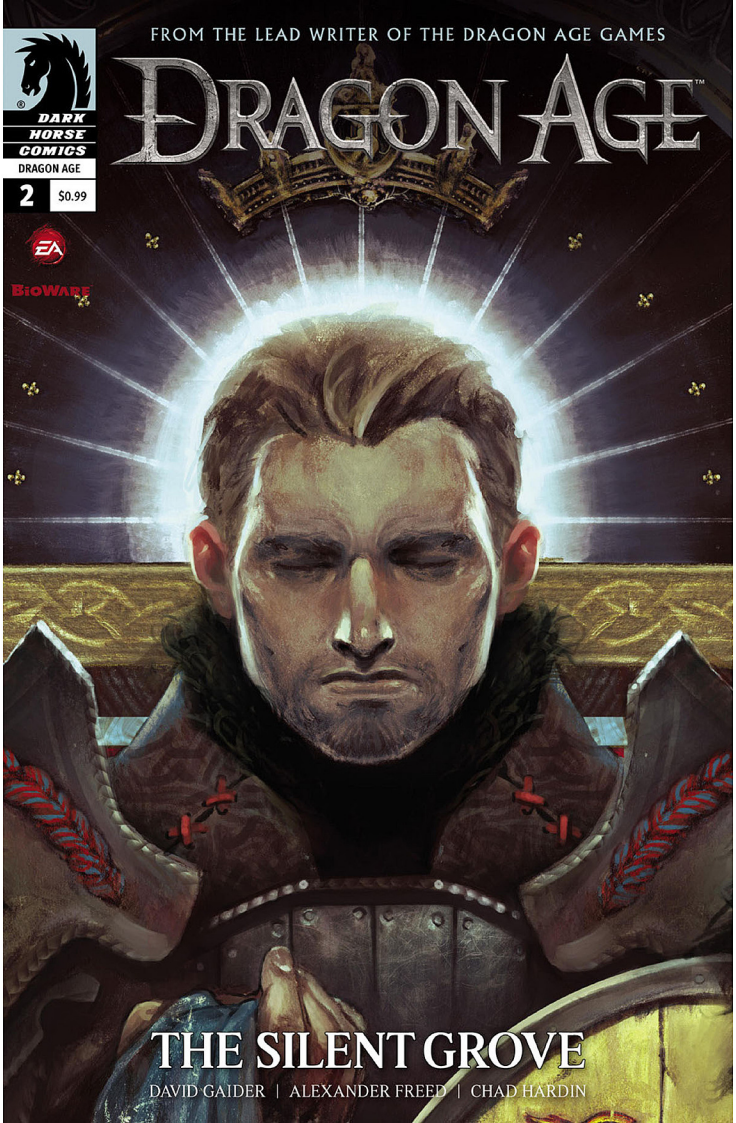
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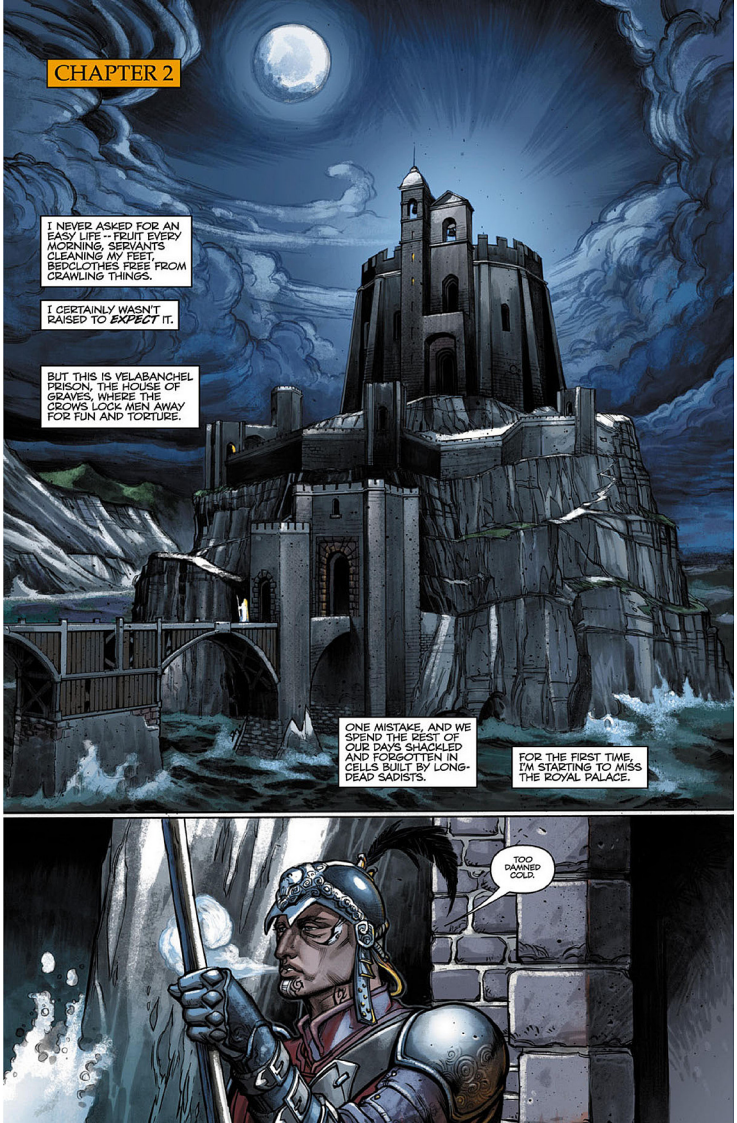
CHAPTER 2
I NEVER ASKED FOR AN EASY LIFE -- FRUIT EVERY MORNING, SERVANTS CLEANING MY FEET, BEDCLOTHES FREE FROM CRAWLING THINGS.
I CERTAINLY WASN'T RAISED TO *EXPECT* IT.
BUT THIS IS VELABANCHEL PRISON, THE HOUSE OF GRAVES, WHERE THE CROWS LOCK MEN AWAY FOR FUN AND TORTURE.
ONE MISTAKE, AND WE SPEND THE REST OF OUR DAYS SHACKLED AND FORGOTTEN IN CELLS BUILT BY LONG-DEAD SADISTS.
FOR THE FIRST TIME, I'M STARTING TO MISS THE ROYAL PALACE.
TOO DAMNED COLD.

REMIND ME WHY WE'RE HERE, EXACTLY?
A RESCUE.
I WAS ASKING HER -- WHY ARE YOU AND I HERE?
I ASKED YOU TO COME.
WAS I DRUNK?
MAYBE.
SO WHY ARE YOU HERE?
BECAUSE PIRACY IS EXPENSIVE, AND OUR FRIEND HERE IS DRIPPING WITH COIN.
I HIRED YOU TO BRING ME TO ANTIVA AND HELP ME REACH THE ARCHIVE.
IF YOU WANT TO LEAVE, THEN LEAVE -- AND I'LL FIND MY OWN WAY HOME.
WE'LL FIND A WAY HOME.
IF I RAN OFF NOW, I'D MISS THE EXTRA BATHTUB FULL OF JEWELS YOU'LL PAY FOR HELPING YOU DO THE IMPOSSIBLE.
(IT'S MY CREW, I'M AFRAID -- ALL TERRIBLY GREEDY.)
BUT WE DO HAVE A PROBLEM -- THAT GATE OPENS FROM THE INSIDE.
THAT'S NOT A PROBLEM.

I'M NOT SURE HOW MUCH WEIGHT THE ROPE WILL HOLD, BUT DON'T WORRY--
-- I'LL HAVE THE GATE OPEN BY THE TIME YOU'RE FINISHED GAWKING.
DID HE JUST CALL ME FAT?
THAT'S QUITE A CROSSBOW.
HE CALLS IT BIANCA.
I PREFER NOT TO ENCOURAGE HIM.
VARRIC, MY BOY...YOU REALLY KNOW HOW TO PICK YOUR ALLIES.
"YOU DON'T SAY, ISABELLA? A CHANCE TO GAIN THE EAR OF A KING?
"WHO COULD REGRET ASSOCIATING WITH ROYALTY?"

INTRUDER!
"AND SO THE STURDY BUT OUT-OF-PRACTICE DWARF RACED TO REMEDY HIS ERROR...
"...AND DID NOT ENTIRELY SUCCEED."

ALL RIGHT-- NO VARRIC, NOTHING TO DO BUT WAIT.
YOU WANT TO TELL ME WHAT ALL THE MYSTERY IS ABOUT?
WHO ARE WE HERE FOR?
I...CAN'T.
DIDN'T YOU USED TO BE FUN?
I THOUGHT THIS WAS ABOUT RECAPTURING THE OLD DAYS FOR YOU -- A DRINK, A SWORD, AND A PARTNER WHO DOESN'T GIVE A DAMN ABOUT YOUR BLOODLINE?
IF ALL YOU WANTED WAS TO SCOWL AND BREAK THINGS, WHY NOT DO THAT AT HOME AND SEND AN ARMY HERE INSTEAD?
IT'S NEVER THAT SIMPLE. BESIDES --
-- I'M NOT DOING THIS AS KING.
BUT YOU ARE A KING.
TRUTHFULLY?
I'M NOT A VERY GOOD KING.
YOU'RE A DIFFICULT MAN, ALISTAIR.
BUT ONLY A GOOD KING WOULD SAY THAT.
STOP PRATTLING AND GET OVER HERE!

CROWS ARE ON THE WAY!
YES, OF COURSE THEY ARE.
AND OF COURSE WE'RE RUNNING TOWARD THEM...
PATHETIC CREATURES.
DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOU'RE GOING?
YES.
THEN GO.
WHAT--?
THANK YOU BOTH.

I WILL FIND HIM.
KILL THE OTHERS.
ARE WE SUPPOSED TO BE HEROES, NOW?
I THOUGHT WE'D FIGHT TO THE DEATH, LIKE IN OLD TIMES.
OR NOT.
PLAN B, THEN?
ABSOLUTELY.

THE THIRD LEVEL. THE SEVENTY-NINTH CELL.
I'M FOLLOWING TALLY MARKS DRAWN ON THE WALLS BY *ILLITERATES*.
I'M NOT SURE I'M GOING THE RIGHT WAY. BUT THERE CAN'T *BE* A WORSE PLACE THAN HERE.
THERE ARE SCREAMS FROM THE CELLS LIKE A CHORUS. I'M STUDYING WITH THE TEMPLARS AGAIN, LISTENING TO THE HOLY CHANT, AND I JUST WANT *OUT*.
LIKE DOGS BEFORE A STORM.
THEY HOWL WHEN THE WINDS OF WRATH BLOW.
WHICH DOG ARE *YOU* HERE TO FREE?

NO WAY TO BUY YOU OFF WITH GOODIES THEN.
ARRGAH!

THERE'S NO SOUND FROM INSIDE. NOTHING I CAN HEAR OVER THE SHOUTING.
AT FIRST, I DON'T EVEN SEE HIM -- I MISTAKE A HUMAN BEING FOR A LUMP OF CLOTH, RAGGED AND FILTHY IN THE CORNER.
THEN HE MOVES.
HE LOOKS AT ME WITH A FLASH OF RECOGNITION IN OLD EYES, AND I FORCE MYSELF TO SAY A NAME:
KING MARIC...?
THE NAME OF MY FATHER.
TOO LATE.
MUCH TOO LATE.
AND WITH THAT, I LEARN MY QUEST HAS FAILED...
TO BE CONTINUED...

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FLEMETH STATUE

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